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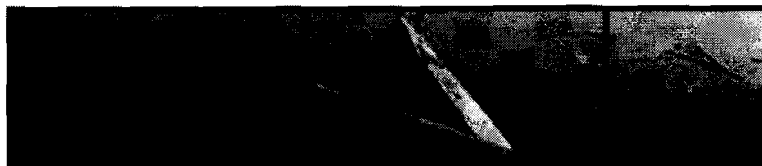
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Second brucellosis case found

By SCOTT McMILLION Chronicle Staff Writer

LIVINGSTON n Brucellosis has been detected in a Paradise Valley cattle herd, the Montana Department of Livestock announced Monday.

That means the Montana beef industry loses its brucellosis-free status; it also means extra expense and labor for ranchers all over the state.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer said Monday he was saddened but not surprised by the news, an event he has predicted several times.

"It's not a proud day," he said. "But it's not one that didn't come without a lot of predictions."

Federal scientists at a laboratory in Ames, Iowa, confirmed the presence of the disease in one cow Monday, the state DOL said in a written news release.

"In this particular case, the owner did everything right," state Veterinarian Marty Zalusky said. "The cow had been vaccinated twice and was part of a herd management plan."

DOL spokesman Steve Merritt said he'd been ordered not to identify the owner. Schweitzer said the herd was in the Pray area, about 20 miles south of Livingston.

The case illustrates how existing brucellosis vaccines are not 100 percent effective.

In May 2007, the disease was found in a cattle herd from Bridger that had mixed with animals from a Paradise Valley herd. That discovery led to the destruction of 301 cows and 284 calves, a move required by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

With the second outbreak of the disease comes the automatic loss of Montana's brucellosis-free status. That means all bulls and non-spayed female cattle older than 18 months must be tested for the disease 30 days prior to being shipped out of state, according to the federal rules.

It could mean destruction of the infected animal's home herd.

After the outbreak in Bridger, Schweitzer began pushing for a "split-state status" for the area adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, the nation's last reservoir for the strain of brucellosis that affects cattle. The split-state status, if achieved, would have meant that if brucellosis was found inside the special zone near the park, the rest of the state would have been unaffected.

However, he met intense opposition from the Montana Stockgrowers Association and a number of local ranchers.

The Montana Cattlemen's Association, another trade group, supported the governor.

He accused the Stockgrowers of "mischaracterizing" the split-state proposal.

"I just wish the Stockgrowers would have agreed with the Cattlemen's Association and we could have moved ahead," Schweitzer said. "Had we implemented split state, this wouldn't have affected the rest of the state."

Schweitzer dropped the idea in November in the face of the intense opposition. He said Monday that he believed the status could have been achieved by now if the beef industry had gotten behind it.

Stockgrowers Executive Vice President Errol Rice said Monday he disagreed with that. Working out the complicated rules for the split-state status would have taken up to two years, he said, adding that he still opposes split state.

Both elk and bison carry brucellosis. The disease has a much lower occurrence rate in elk, but they tend to wander farther and mix more with cattle. The brucellosis in the Bridger herd likely came from elk, scientists said last year.

Bison are subjected to hazing and slaughter if they leave the park. Elk are subjected to neither.

Schweitzer stressed that consumers have nothing to fear about consuming Montana beef, but losing the brucellosis-free status could prove expensive for people who raise purebred breeding cattle.

A deal was in the works to export some Montana cattle to Russia, he said, but that could be quashed by the brucellosis news.

"This maybe puts it on the back burner for a few years or maybe kills it altogether," he said.

Scott McMillion can be reached at scottm@dailychronicle.com.

Reader Comments

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mntnview wrote on Jun 10, 2008 8:00 AM:

" This is absolutely GREAT NEWS, at least for most of us.

Maybe now we can quit hazing and killing the YNP Buffalo and start treating them with respect and dignity.

I do feel for some of you ranchers, but remember cattle were imported here and not the natural inhabitants. "

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Robert Hoskins wrote on Jun 10, 2008 9:17 AM:

" There is no scientific proof that elk were the cause of the Morgan/Bridger brucellosis outbreak and